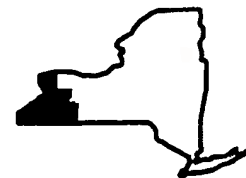




REGION 9, Gerald E Mikol, Regional Director  
Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie,  
Niagara and Wyoming counties



## New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

George E. Pataki, Governor  
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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **DEC ANNOUNCES AUTOMOTIVE MERCURY SWITCH REPLACEMENT PROGRAM**

*Replacement Switches will be available to the public for free from participating Vehicle Inspection stations*

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Region 9 Director Gerald Mikol announced today the start of a new program aimed at preventing mercury from being released to the environment when vehicles are recycled. Currently, many of today's cars contain mercury switches in their hood and trunk convenience lighting. By replacing these switches, 90% of the mercury pollution from vehicle recycling will be prevented. In order to promote the removal of this potential source of pollution, the public will have the option to request the free non-mercury replacement switches, which can take less than a minute to install, when their autos are serviced at participating locations.

2000 replacement switches, which are identical to the existing switch except that they contain a ball bearing instead of mercury, will be available from participating Monro Muffler Shops, Mr. Oil Change and Valvoline Instant Oil Change locations that are Vehicle Inspection stations. Mercury switches are found in American made vehicles manufactured from the 1970s to the present. When the supply of free switches is depleted, participating companies may elect to continue offering the mercury switch replacement for free or at a nominal \$1 per switch.

"This program is important because if the mercury from just one switch escaped to the environment, it could contaminate a one acre lake for a year," said Director Mikol. "When the 2000 switches are installed, and the mercury containing switches are properly recycled, the program will have prevented the release of nearly 5 pounds of mercury."

Recent EPA studies conclude that mercury from automotive switches and other mercury containing products are a significant portion of national mercury release inventory. Nationwide, an estimated 6 to 10 tons per year of mercury from automotive switches is emitted to the air when cars are shredded and then melted down in recycled steel production. Smaller releases to air and water happen at automotive salvage yards when cars are crushed, or at scrap metal yards where crushed vehicles are size reduced. Rain moves airborne mercury into lakes and streams where conversion to MethylMercury happens through bacterial action. MethylMercury, a highly toxic form of mercury to animals and humans, gets concentrated in the food chain and ultimately ends up in fish where concentrations are highest. Fish consumption advisories for mercury now exist in all the states and provinces bordering the Great Lakes.

The automotive mercury switches collected from the program will be sent to a permitted recycling facility where the mercury will be removed from the switches, cleaned, and repackaged for distribution as a commodity. An agreement with a mercury product manufacturer will ensure that the recycled mercury will be used only in products that have a manufacturer take-back program for end-of-life products.

The automotive mercury switch replacement program is funded through a \$50,000 Pollution Prevention Grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Region 5 Great Lakes Program Office to the DEC.